

Seven Practices to Manage High Stress Times

(Bottlenecks Happen!)

- 1) **Sleep.** Sleep is a critical factor in adding to stress or making it more difficult to manage. Most people need at least 8½ and even 9 hours of sleep. If you can't get sleep on a regular basis, which is entirely the norm at camp during "high season," then following all the rest of the suggestions is even more important. Cat naps can help!
→ Pointer: If you find that you are waking up in the middle of the night or very early and you start to feel anxious about all you have on your plate, *don't stay in bed ruminating!* Get up and either journal for a few minutes or read something soothing until you feel tired. Even jotting down a few ideas that come to you in the night can help you calm down and get back to sleep.
- 2) **Meditate/Breathe.** I include many things in this category, such as the following:
 - a) Momentary meditations ("Call to the Universe" and "Door Knob Transition")
 - b) Prayer, even if just brief prayers on your way from one location to another;
 - c) Journaling, which is just a more formal way of *reflecting*; and
 - d) Moments of gratitude.It is helpful to incorporate many moments throughout your day, even if they might last for only a minute or two. **The idea is to quiet your mind for a few minutes.**
- 3) **Make Lists.** There are many advantages to making lists, not the least of which is simply keeping track of tasks and details. Some other advantages are prioritizing your tasks; identifying what tasks you might delegate; seeing which tasks might get done at what particular times.
- 4) **Delegate/Collaborate.** Know when to get someone else to do things for you (or with you) that free you up to give more attention to the more critical or meaningful things on your list of responsibilities. Positive counselor collaboration takes good communication!
- 5) **Take a walk!** Getting some movement into your day can help cut the stress and may even help you sleep better at night. Walking raises testosterone and lowers cortisol. See if some of the meetings you need to have can be done on a walk.
- 6) **Plan Ahead!** Have something to look forward to that serves as a break. Anticipating a break—a night out; a phone call; a partial day off; a full day off—is almost as good as the break itself. Having something to look forward to helps us hang in when the work is intense. We get to countdown to the time when we can let up a little!
- 7) **Know What Triggers You.** If you know what it is that typically sets your anxiety in motion, you can anticipate it and plan ahead for it. Call it out! Go on offense!

"...have you been Ditterized?"

Robert B. Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW

bobditter@gmail.com

Practice

Balancing Your Act on the High Wire
Markel Webinar February 13, 2019
Bob Ditter

Supportive Structural Interventions, Practices and Skills

Staff “Home Groups.” Blended groups of first time and seasoned or returning staff members, meeting once a week throughout the summer, talking about the pressures & challenges of camp life, the successes, the breakthroughs. This is a peer group designed to offer guided peer support to staff.

Matching new staff with seasoned “guides” or mentors for orientation.

Mindfulness Practices

(T) Transitional (B) Break (PRE) Before an event (OG) Ongoing (All season)

(OG) (PRE) Self-Validation

(OG) (PRE) Call to the Universe

(T) Doorknob

(T) (B) (PRE) Belly Breath/Deep Breathing

(T) (B) 10-minute Walk and Breathe

(OG) (PRE) Notice Your Breath

(OG) (PRE) Shifting from Empathy to Compassion

Anxiety in Campers and Staff

Bob Ditter

The Numbers

- 25.1 % of children ages 13-18 formally diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (NIMH 2016)
- 14.3 % of college students Dx anxiety (American College Health Association)
- Healthy Camps Study 2015: The single greatest concern of camp directors regarding staff was their level of anxiety at camp

Typical Symptoms at Camp Among Staff (which mirror those of Campers!)

- Sleeplessness (trouble getting to sleep/staying asleep/waking early)
- Asking repetitive questions (especially during orientation)
- Many somatic complaints (trips to Health Center)
- Not eating
- Fearful or inflexible (struggling with the demands of their campers/schedule)
- Isolating or not connecting well with other staff/Disappearing
- “I can’t” statements (needing a lot of downtime)
- Feeling overwhelmed by campers, schedule, weather, camp food
- Leaving camp early because they are overwhelmed

What’s Behind the Dramatic Rise in Anxiety

1) Social Media

- We all compare our “insides” with other peoples’ “outsides”
- Social media increases this tendency
- We tend to “brand” ourselves with our posts, pics, likes, dislikes—a “photo-shopped self”
- We edit out the perceived “weaknesses”
- What we edit out—doubts, failures, insecurities, vulnerabilities—is what makes us human! *It is our humanity we tend to hide.*
- Comparing ourselves to everyone else’s “best” leads to intensified perfectionism → holding ourselves to an increasingly unreasonable and unattainable standard

Quote: “You can’t help but compare yourself and wonder why your life isn’t as glamorous or wonderful. It’s like you can never be enough.” -first year college student home on break fall 2018

Quote: “I find that only a small percentage of my job is actually doing my job. The rest is performing millions of acts of tweeting, posting, liking, disliking, sharing and retweeting. All of it an attempt to sell a semi-fictional, much more appealing version of myself.” –Ruth Whippman, author, *America the Anxious: Why our search for happiness is driving us crazy and how to find it for real.*

2) Failed Parenting Strategies

Quote: “I only want my kid to be happy!” Frequent quote of parents to camp directors! (Just give him/her whatever he/she wants!) –Camper Parent

See the next page for typical parent approaches that fail anxious kids

Typical Strategies that Fail Anxious Kids (and those kids who have become staff members!)

- **Frontloading** (Planning for a specific fear). Anxiety is bottomless! What makes you anxious changes over time.
- **Thought distraction** (Getting someone to think of something other than what frightens them). Learning to face anxiety and deal with it.
- **Thought stopping** (Trying to push a fearful thought away). The more we try and eliminate a worried thought the more it asserts itself!
- **Thought replacement** (Replacing a “bad” thought with a “good” one). Learning to deal with anxiety as a natural part of life. Anxiety will always find a home!

3) The Pressure to Perform

- Loss of unstructured, self-directed play (Time to wander, tinker, experiment. Gaming has replaced this!)
- Less time for relationships, including intimate ones
- Less time for healthy risk-taking in exchange for resume` building and “getting ahead”
- Many parents see “play” as a waste of time

Anxiety to Self: “I am here for two things—Comfort and certainty! As long as everything goes as planned, we’re good! But as soon as either of those things change, I will come out swinging!”

Anxiety is Like a Cult Leader: “As long as you follow the rules, I won’t push the alarm button!”

—Love, Your Worry Wart

Your Worry Wart hates Surprises! Your worry wants to know exactly what’s happening and what the plan is. As soon as something new comes along—or as soon as there is uncertainty in your life...your “friend ‘Worry Wart’ will set off the alarm bells!

We Actually Know How to Treat Anxiety

We do so successfully with kids all the time!

Offense, not Defense. On offense, you are coming from strength. On defense, you are coming from fear and a sense of vulnerability.

- Give your fear or worry a name.
- Call your fear out by its name
- Know that your alarm system can be wrong

Tolerate and Normalize Discomfort. Life comes with its share of discomfort and uncertainty. What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger!

Externalize and React Differently to Worrisome Thoughts. Make worry a “thing” you can then address.

Recognize Problem-Solving as Different from Ruminating. One is about solution, the other about fear.

Soften Perfectionism. There are moments that are perfect, not life!

All Learning is Trial-and-Error. No one gets it right all the time, every time. This is human.

Vulnerability Makes Us Relevant, Human, Stringer. Some people confuse it with weakness. It touches others and opens barriers, makes deeper connections

Know What Triggers You. Most people know what makes them worry. Make a plan and include others. Isolating yourself with your Worry Wart is not a great plan!

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Managing Life at Camp

Congratulations! You have managed to get one **plum** of a job for this summer! You'll be outdoors, doing fun activities, mingling with other interesting young adults your age and doing something meaningful with kids. If you have been to camp before you know how much of an impact it can have on kids and how much fun that can be. That said, if you've already been a counselor then you also know that life at camp can sometimes be challenging! Weather, long days, less privacy, getting the kids to listen, being away from other friend and family—these can all be stressful for you, even if you're having a blast at camp! So, we've created this little survey to help us help you manage the stress that inevitably comes with fun at camp.

- 1) When you need to “recharge your batteries,” do you typically prefer do that alone or with others?
Please circle one of the following:
←More “alone” end of the scale 1 2 3 4 5 More on the “with others” end of the scale→
- 2) On a scale from 1 to 5 below, how easy is it for you to make new friends in a place that is new for you? Please circle one of the following:
←Not “very easy” end of the scale 1 2 3 4 5 “Very easy” end of the scale→
- 3) Of all the things about life at camp, what do you think is going to be the most challenging for you?

- 4) How might we help you with that?

- 5) What do you typically do to manage the every-day stress in your life at home or at school?

- 6) Have you ever struggled with anxiety or depression? (Again, any information you share with us will be held in confidence) Please check one of the following: yes no
- 7) On a scale from 1 to 5 below, how important is your cell phone and/or your connection to social media to you?
Please circle one of the following:
←Very important end of the scale 1 2 3 4 5 Less important end of the scale→
- 8) On a scale from 1 to 5 below, how difficult will it be for you to adjust to life at camp with regard to not having access to your phone or social media for 80% or more of your day?
Please circle one of the following:
←“Very difficult” end of the scale 1 2 3 4 5 “Not so difficult” end of the scale→
- 9) Is there anything else that you would like us to know as a way of helping you adjust to and having the best time at camp ever?